

MAPPING MEMORY

Linking the Landscape of Sicily's Tuna Fisheries

One of the many elements that link Sicily to the sea is its tuna fisheries. Tuna fishing has been the backbone of Sicily's economy and diet for much of its recorded history. The value and abundance of tuna arose from Sicily's particular position within the Mediterranean as the Atlantic Bluefin tuna's main hatching and spawning grounds. Traveling all the way from the Gulf of Mexico, the tuna entered the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar and lingered along Sicily's western and northern coasts, along which fisheries developed. Though the time of their exact origin is disputed, Sicily's tuna fisheries, or *tonnare*, were likely established throughout the island as early as the ninth century AD by Arab colonists. Comprised of fixed nets and coastal factories, the *tonnare* are paragons of the island's medieval vernacular architecture, combining elements of both North African as well as European structural and decorative motifs.

Today, the *tonnare* remain as relics of the once essential role that tuna fishing played in the island's economy and culture. Beginning in the 1950s, many tuna fisheries closed due to the dwindling population of tuna and changing attitudes about the use and value of industrial space. As a result, tuna fishing is rarely practiced today, for it requires many skilled hands and no longer generates profit. Within some municipalities, there is concern that the traditions and history associated with tuna fishing are disappearing. Local governments and communities have responded by adapting their *tonnare* to contemporary cultural and hospitality uses.

The *tonnare* are important to Sicilian cultural history as witnessed by efforts to reuse them in various ways. From the *Tonnara di Favignana*, adapted as a maritime museum in western Sicily, to the *Tonnara di Marzamemi*, now a luxury hotel in southeastern Sicily, numerous old fishery structures across the island have been converted to museums, cultural centers, hotels, and

even movie sets. In order to understand their significance, it is necessary to examine the function of these factory buildings in their contemporary adapted forms. Since the disappearance of the tuna industry, what meaning(s) have the *tonnare* structures held for their surrounding communities? As Aldo Rossi might query, do they function as monuments within a post-industrial landscape, imbued with collective memory, or as something else? **Tackling these questions brings up larger concerns about preserving factory buildings and postindustrial landscapes.** As local economies shift and former industrial centers become obsolete, how do communities—like those in Sicily—reckon with their often complicated legacies via architecture? There is some concern about the restoration of the *tonnare* as luxury properties. How are communities employing the preservation of these former industrial complexes to re-envision their futures?

To address these questions, I will focus on eight *tonnare* in Sicily, which range in states of preservation and types of adaptation (Fig. 1 & Figs. 2.1 - 2.8). I will document and analyze the distinctive architecture of these factory buildings—an in-depth study of which has not yet been done—and show how they have developed into their contemporary adapted forms. The *tonnare*, as examples of early Mediterranean industrial architecture, express a unique mingling of architectural styles found only in Sicily, including Norman, North African Islamic, and Byzantine motifs. As a native Italian speaker, I will also engage in dialogue with local residents in order to understand their relationships to their *tonnare*. The outcome of this research will be a folio of drawings and photographs, accompanied by a written article, exploring how these buildings have changed over time, both physically and symbolically, and the ways in which medieval industrial structures can be utilized and experienced in the present.



Fig 1 Map of Sicily with Itinerary

ITINERARY

July-Aug 2022

Days 1-10 – Siracusa

- Days 1-3: *Tonnara di Portopalo*
- Days 4-7: *Tonnara di Marzamemi*
- Days 8-10: *Tonnara di Santa Panagia*

Days 11-20 – Palermo

- Days 11-13: *Tonnara di Arenella*
- Days 14-16: *Tonnara dell'Orsa*
- Days 17-20: Archives (*Palermo Istituto Centrale per gli Archivi*)

Days 21-33 – Trapani

- Days 21-23: *Tonnara di San Cusumano*
- Days 24-26: Archives (*Trapani Archivi di Stato*)
- Days 27-30: *Tonnara di Favignana*
- Days 31-33: *Tonnara di Capo Granitola*

ESTIMATED BUDGET

Airfare (MSY > JFK > CTA)	\$ 2,500
Car Rental (33 days)	\$ 1,700
Public Transport (boat travel)	\$ 500
Accommodation (\$50/night)	\$ 1,650
Food (\$80/day)	\$ 2,650
Research Expenses (drawing supplies; library/archive access)	\$ 500
Contingency	\$ 500
Total	\$ 10,000



Fig 2.1 Tonnara di Portopalo



Fig 2.2 Tonnara di Marzamemi



Fig 2.3 Tonnara di Santa Panagia



Fig 2.4 Tonnara di Arenella



Fig 2.5 Tonnara dell'Orsa



Fig 2.6 Tonnara di San Cusumano



Fig 2.7 Tonnara di Favignana



Fig 2.8 Tonnara di Capo Granitola